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Internal Scrap Hurts Rebels In Nicaragua

For the first time I can reveal the internal squabbling that threatens to shatter the CIA-backed guerrilla movement inside Nicaragua. My associate Jon Lee Anderson is the first reporter to have reached the Miskito Indian rebels fighting on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua.

The situation is so bad, Anderson reports, that the Miskito leaders are seriously thinking of pulling their 2,000 guerrillas out of action. They complain bitterly of mistreatment by their nominal allies, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN). Here is my associate's report:

The Indian guerrilla group, called Misura, is fighting to win regional autonomy for their primitive, swampy homeland in eastern Nicaragua. Their leader is Steadman Fagoth, a former Sandinista who is now a bitter foe of the Managua regime.

Like the 13,000-man FDN, the Miskitos get all their arms and supplies from the CIA, but there's a big hitch: the Miskitos get their supplies through the FDN—and they com-

plain about being shortchanged in the process.

Promised 2,000 M16 automatic rifles, the Miskitos got American carbines of World War II vintage. "There's a black market going on between the FDN and the Honduran armed forces," one rebel leader charged. "Some of our carbines were stamped with the initials of one or another of the Honduran police or military forces, and we began seeing Honduran soldiers walking around with brand-new M16s—ours."

The Miskitos claim they have been forced to accept second-class status by Gen. Gustavo Alvarez, Honduran armed forces chief, who helps direct guerrilla activities for the CIA. For example, Miskito leaders are refused travel documents by the Honduran authorities when they try to go abroad and plead their case as an independent rebel group.

Of the original \$80,000 supposed to have been given them by the CIA, Miskito leaders say they didn't get a dime; the FDN got it all. The FDN, they complained, "treats us like a regional wing of their own force. They use us. They even claim our battles as ones fought by them."

The Miskitos are in desperate need of boats and outboard motors to continue fighting in their land of swamps, bayous and rivers along the coast. The FDN has plenty, they said, but won't give them up.

"They have five helicopters, four small planes and five powerful speedboats," a Miskito leader said. "We can't get one [helicopter] to re-provision our isolated combat units or take out our wounded."

"We have men in the field going hungry, while the top honchos in the FDN get \$3,500 monthly salaries and houses and food provided by the Americans. We don't even have a doctor—not one—for 2,000 men."

For the first time the guerrilla leaders gave specific figures on the amount of CIA aid they get. "The gringos have cut us back 25 percent," said one Miskito officer. "Now we only get \$35,000 instead of \$50,000 a month for food, transport—everything we have to buy apart from weapons and ammo, which we get separately."

Assuming that the much larger FDN is paid on at least the same scale, this means the CIA's Nicaraguan enterprise costs more than a quarter million dollars a month, exclusive of arms and ammunition.

The Miskito leaders expressed concern over "left-wing U.S. politicians" who are trying to force the CIA to give up or cut back its support of the anti-Sandinista rebels.

"I hope this isn't going to be another Bay of Pigs," said one Indian leader.